



Raising A Champion:

It Really Does Take a Village

By Melissa L. Brandon

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When J.J. Stark (Jasper Buckshot, SASS #95991) of Eureka, Montana started in the 4-H program as a nine-year-old, he had no idea it would lead him to become a State and National 4-H Cowboy Action Shooting™ Champion. But with nine years in 4-H learning and honing his leadership, work ethic, and organization skills, he has done just that.

On August 2, 2014, Stark participated in and won the First Annual 4-H Western Heritage Invitational Shoot championship in the center fire division, hosted in historic Virginia City, Montana. As part of that



Jasper (J.J. Sparks) with his proud parents, Sparky McGraw (Jamie) and Susan.

competition, he also earned high enough scores to win the Montana Center Fire Championship. These were both possible through his involvement in 4-H along with the support and guidance of many people.

Stark began 4-H as any other member wanting to improve himself in various ways. One was to earn money for college by raising market animals. Another was getting involved with volunteering and community service. But he took advantage of every opportunity the program had to offer to learn and grow as a person.

He joined the youth ambassador program and attended leadership camps. As a younger member, he enjoyed the 4-H shooting sport programs. He took initiative and joined those two loves into a thriving new project for the Lincoln County 4-H program.

Through the local Montana State University Extension office, Stark found out about the 4-H Western Heritage Project. It was created as an option for members who wanted to advance further into shooting sports. Todd Kesner of MSU in Bozeman joined with local historian Will Abbot to create a new shooting sports program. It would focus on the safe handling of firearms and historical study of an era mostly forgotten or embellished.



The accompanying news article originally appeared in the October 2014 edition of the monthly newsletter published by Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc., of Eureka, Montana.

It dramatically shows the true spirit of the Cowboy Way, as exemplified by SASS member Jasper Buckshot and the Cowboys and Cowgirls of The Lincoln County Regulators.

Thanks to Jasper and his parents for providing The Cowboy Chronicle with this information and for granting us permission to reprint it.



Gideon Wilhette, Jasper Buckshot, Koocanusa Kid, and Sweetwater Lilly.

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The time of 1860–1900 was a period of the old west, cowboys, and a breed of men and women that persevered over many hardships. They forged a life out of harsh and unyielding conditions. These were the same men and women responsible for carving out the wilderness of Northwest Montana. They were responsible, honest, and valued ethics. These are the qualities the 4-H Western Heritage Project hopes to instill or enhance in participants by using a living history approach.

“It’s not just shooting. What I like is the kids in the program have taken on the mannerisms and morals of the historic figures they’re portraying,” states Kay Handy (Sweetwater Lilly, SASS #82312), one of Stark’s mentors.

Stark says all the kids have to become a character from 1860–1900. It can be an actual historical figure like Wyatt Earp, or the kids are able to research the era and develop their own character. This choice had Stark digging more into history and creating his persona, Jasper “Buckshot” Morgan. Buckshot worked as security for Wells Fargo transports. These employees carried a gun loaded with buckshot ammunition to protect the cargo, hence the nickname.

Buckshot’s conception first started at the 2010 Rendezvous event. The Lincoln County Regulators, a Eureka, Montana based Cowboy Action Shooting™ group, had an exhibit there. Stark was drawn to the exhibit and got an invitation to come to one of their shoots. He did and he loved it.

Stark joined the Regulators and became friends with its members. They became mentors and helped Stark grow as a shooter. This path also led to Buckshot becoming more of a reality. While Stark was excited about joining the Regulators, he was also hesitant to take on another activity. He was already deeply involved in 4-H, his church, and school. He had heard of the 4-H Western Heritage Project and wondered if the two could be combined.

Stark’s parents encouraged him to look into it. His dad, Jamie Stark (Sparky McGraw, SASS #95990), suggested he might be able to use it as his Teen Lead-



Jasper Buckshot.

ership project. For this project, the member is supposed to organize and develop a working program. Stark approached the Regulators and Kesner about the idea. Both sides were willing to work together. Stark, his father, and some of the Regulators sat down at the 2011 Lincoln County Fair and came up with a plan over biscuits and gravy. It took hard work and organization, but the 4-H Western Heritage Project finally became a part of Lincoln County’s offering. And Buckshot became a little closer to being a reality.

What was so different about Lincoln County’s program was how the Regulators stepped up. Leaders must take a training to get qualified to help with projects. For most areas, there are one or two people who volunteer to take the training. The Regulators offered up eight. It was enough for the trainers to come to Eureka, rather than having the leaders travel to the class. The eight Regulators, which included Paul Tribble (Gideon Wilhette, SASS #81340, Life Member), Kay Handy and her husband, Daryle (Kococanusa Kid, SASS #82311), completed the training and started helping the kids.

“Here you have not just one person, but a whole club that stepped up and said, ‘We’re going to mentor these kids.’ And look at what it’s done,” Jamie says. “It’s really a statement about the people we have in our area.”

These eight Regulators started with six 4-H members in the program. However, they don’t just learn how to shoot a gun. It’s about safety, discipline, and encouraging learning through a living history environment.

“You have to abide by a certain set of rules. You botch one of them and it’s a big penalty. So they learn from the beginning

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everything is safety, safety, safety, first. Especially when you're on the range. I've really benefited a lot from it; just being around these people and watching their example," Stark states about the program and his mentors.

These same mentors teach other things about that time—honesty, integrity, and taking responsibility for your own actions. On top of that, as part of the living history, they also help with other skills. Some of those include metalwork, cooking, leatherwork, woodwork, and sewing. The kids have to do research on the era to match period correctness. There is a

this summer with the intention of having fun. Last year he competed, but says he went in with the wrong attitude.

"I psyched myself out. I thought I had it in the bag, but I did terrible. This year I decided I would still try to do my best, but realized there are a lot of really good shooters there. I kept my focus right. I mean, we get to be out there shooting guns. It's fun," said Stark.

The competition this year was also different in structure. Instead of going right into the shoot, there were two days of workshops. They included a wide

variety of subjects and allowed the 52 participants and their families to get to know each other first. Stark took it as an opportunity to become a mentor himself. His mother, Susan Stark, talks about the trip and how this program presents participants with the chance to grow:

"J.J. starts teaching this little nine-year-old boy from Missouri to rope. This kid was struggling being there—he just wasn't having any fun at all. The fact that J.J. took the time during the competition to teach that little guy to rope just changed his trip," Susan explains.

With all the activities available for Stark and his family before the shoot, he was more relaxed when shooting



The chaps Jasper crafted as a 4-H project.

workbook Kesner wrote for the project. But most kids get so excited about the project and history, they go beyond that book.

"All of a sudden they become more interested in their own history. They look for their genealogy. It develops their research skills. They're beginning to excel in school and whatever else they're doing because of this," Stark says.

Part of that interest is in the clothing. The kids wear clothes that follow the standards of the era. Stark wears chaps he made himself with the guidance of his leaders and parents. They were a leatherwork project for 4-H made from elk and buffalo hide.

The guns he used to win the championships are period correct as well. He took them to Virginia City

started. The competition is set up in stages, each of which involves shooting a series of metal targets in a certain order. And it's not only about speed. There are penalties for safety violations, misses and shooting out of order. As part of the competition, there is a history test, and that score factors into the results. However, when the dust cleared and the pencils were put down, Stark had come out the winner. He performed well enough to not only win the Center Fire Division of the Montana 4-H State Championship, but the National 4-H Championship as well.

"It's a point in pride and humility all at the same time. Watching this guy develop—I knew it was in him last year. It's a great statement for the commu-

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nity. He’s going against kids nationwide that have been involved since the beginning,” says Tribble.

Stark puts a lot of praise back on his leaders and mentors. “I can’t thank these guys enough. They’re amazing people. I definitely could not have done it without them,” Stark says. And although Tribble replies with, “Hey, you carried your own weight, cowboy,” Stark and his family know the value of having positive influences.

These Regulators volunteered their time and knowledge to help kids they didn’t know. They traveled to competitions with their own vehicles and on their own dime. They are the kind of people that make a community outstanding. They encourage kids to get involved with the program, even if they might not have a strong foundation. “When someone says they don’t have guns, that doesn’t matter. We can find you guns. We’ve got ammo. What better to



Montana Silversmith watches, awarded to Jasper for the Montana State and National 4-H Championships.

use it on, than to help kids?” Kay questions.

It’s that attitude that has made Stark want to pay it forward. After benefiting from such great mentors, he would like to come back and help with a new group of kids. “I’d like to see other kids develop like I have. I think it’d be neat to teach the next champion. ♪



COMIC BOOK CORNER

Wild Bill Pecos

The *Westerner*, featuring Wild Bill Pecos, was produced by Orbit Publishing, one of the smaller comic book companies of the 1940s, and had a 28-issue run from June, 1948 to December, 1951. Wild Bill Pecos took a fictional part in several different historical events, including Little Big Horn in issue #19 (March, 1949), which is reprinted here. The writer of this story, Bill Woolfolk, and

the artist, Mort Meskin, went on to long careers with larger comic book outfits, notably National Periodical Publications (DC), and to work on notable characters such as Batman. ♪

